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EDUCATIONAL LAWS AND PRACTICES FOR RECONCILIATION IN SPAIN

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1 - Introduction. History of a conflict

Hobbes said that man is evil by nature and society needs absolute power to prevent confrontation. The assemblies are the source of anarchy, he said. But too much power, unchecked despotism, makes difficult to relieve political elites, and these societies fall to internal revolutions or in the hands of more innovative foreign enemies.

By the time Hobbes explained his theories, Spinoza opened the way for the evolution of political regimes declaring that in the Bible there was no clear preference of God for a single system. Soon after, in the moments of the triumph of the English Revolution and parliamentarism, Locke said that human beings are not, *a priori*, good or bad, but follow their instincts like other animals and the conflicts among them can be resolved speaking, parleying. Several centuries later, these principles remain valid for resolving conflicts in our society.

Globalization makes the current states too small to be actors in the world, but they are too big to identify with them, and some nationalist tendencies have returned, sometimes violently, in recent decades, when ways for dialogue are not found. A debate on television between opposite nationalist leaders, for example, probably only serves to annoy the audience and to open old wounds.

However, the school can promote understanding and reconciliation more effectively than other culture means. Although in Spain there are other nationalisms (Catalan, Galician), the Basque conflict was more violent and its school system could serve as an example of pacification. It is not easy to simplify that matter, because the Basque conflict has a long history of violence, especially the last two centuries, but I will try to be brief to tell how it has been performed.

The Basque country is a mountainous area of northern Spain and southern France, in the seaside of Atlantic Ocean. It is a very rich area, with income levels significantly higher than the Spanish and European average, with large industrial and service development, but with a social disparity, sometimes different and opposing political tendencies.

In the past, Basques fought in the defense of special laws that protected political autonomy (Carlist Wars) and their right to use their native language, Basque or *Euskera*, so it is considered a clear example of ethnopolitical conflict. Recognizing the importance of this language, Victor Hugo wrote in 1843 that "the Basque language is

the land itself, almost a religion" and its maintenance is essential in the development of Basque nationalism, it's more than a symbol.

During the Second Spanish Republic (1931-1939), the Basques got a significant degree of autonomy which was destroyed by the Franco dictatorship, a centralized, authoritarian regime that attacked Basque language and culture. In villages and schools of the Basque Country (Euskadi), the use of Basque was forbidden. The gradual disappearance of the Euskera led many organizations to try to recover it through cultural events and cooperative schools. But Franco's opposition forced them to create clandestine political organizations and, some time later, the foundation of ETA, a military organization of resistance against the Spanish government. In some areas, almost every family had a member in jail or had received a beating from the police, and there were a lot of house searches, road controls, etc. In last years of Franco's age, ETA had a large popular support.

2 - Political and legal changes after Franco's death

In the period of the transition to democracy in Spain (from 1975), most Basques did not accept the Constitution (1978), although it granted an autonomous government and parliament, but closed the ways to independence, desired by a large majority of Basque nationalists. ETA continued performing sabotage and terrorist acts, which were particularly violent between 1978 and the early 80s, in a moment of crisis with a great number of unemployed young people¹. The Spanish State supported a counterterrorism movement, called GAL, that did a made a disservice to peace. The statutes of autonomy (1979), indiscriminate violence against civilians and the loss of foreign investment resulting from terrorist acts were subtracting support to ETA (now 12% of the Basque population are agree with their objectives, but only 3% with their methods²). But the problem is far from resolved because, although the majority of Basques renounce to violence, remain very actives supporters of independence or the right of a higher grade of self-government. That causes permanent frictions with the authorities in Madrid. For mutual forgiveness, both sides should forgive in order to make the steps towards better relations. The problem is that sometimes one or the other one understands these gestures as a weakness of the opponent, and it generates a sharp step back.

In those years, lawyers did their job to reach peace. The Basque Country enjoys a favorable tax system and the highest level of self-governance of any nonstate entity inside the European Union. It has its own television and radio stations and it manages the entire budget for health, police and education.

But there have also been mistakes as banning some politic parties, rather than promoting open discussion, which is the only way to remove, in my opinion, the sense of repression and the process block.

¹ Enrique Gil Calvo: Los depredadores audiovisuales. Juventud urbana y cultura de masas (*Audiovisual predators. Urban youth and mass culture*) Madrid, Tecnos, 1985.

² Euskobarómetro, may 2005.

T. 1- Laws affecting education in the Basque country

1978 – Spanish Constitution. Not accepted by most of the Basque political parties.
1979 - Statute of Autonomy (Main Law) of the Basque Country
1979 - Act on Bilingualism. Two official languages.
1982 - Basic Law Regulating the use of Euskara. Guidelines to ensure bilingualism.
1983 - Law for language use in non-university education. Compulsory subjects. Models A, B and D: several ways to bilingualism. Teacher training in Euskera, editorials respect towards traditions, history, Basque culture. The implementation of this model has been the main effort of the Basque educational system.
1990 - General Law of the Educational System (LOGSE). A broad consensus and regional autonomy in school aspects.
1992 - Basque Syllabus. Textbooks must be approved by the Basque Parliament. There are two basic criteria for textbooks: Respecting to the Syllabus and development of democratic values.
1993 – Basque Public School Act. It is necessary teachers' training and pupils' education must be in both languages.

Recovering the Euskera, legally and in practice, was the crucial point. The majority of Basque society reclaimed it in order to prevent the disappearance of this language, one of the oldest in Europe, and they fought, for example, against the names of the towns written in Spanish. The intense use of Euskera at schools has gone further than in the rest of the society, contributing to reconciliation.

The primary aim of the Basque educational plans was bilingualism. Three models were offered to the parents' choice: A, B or D (lowest to highest presence of Euskera in the education of their children). School communities, families, teachers and students have been the ones who have worked hard in the Basque society to achieve the goal of bilingualism.

In only 40 years, Euskera has progressed from being legally prohibited to be one of the official languages of the Basque Autonomous Community. Today in the Basque country there is some disappointment, boredom or frustration on many policy issues, and even a black pessimism about the fact that they have not reached an agreement in this long conflict. But almost everybody agrees with the development of Euskera in education and social tension is smaller because of it (but there are many wounds still opened).

Education is making a dream come real: to live with a relative comfort Basques who feel only Basque, Basques who feel only Spanish, and Basques who feel both Basque and Spanish, many identities living together in the same village or town, several

identities in a single person. It is interesting that especially in schools, where diversity is more present than in other places, we can observe a more pacific coexistence.

Some colleagues in the Basque country tell us that educational laws and the whole process of change have been advised and prepared by educators and experienced teachers, inspired in the cooperative Nordic model, as in Finland, one of the most valued in the world.

3 - The practice in schools

The main issue, **the teaching of Euskera**, which seemed the most controversial and emotional one, has been an undeniable factor of peace. Great efforts have been made to train teachers in this language. In 20 years the percentage of bilingual teacher increased from 5 to 70% (more in primary than in secondary school), and there has been a massive change to the models B and D. Currently the model A, which was previously above 50%, represents only 10%, model B, 35% and the model D, all in Euskera with subject in Spanish, 55%. Some of the teachers strongly protest against the system of accessing to certain jobs and about some irregularities of the selection process. They think that bilingualism is moving too fast, and several associations denounce the excesses in their implementation³, but in general it is well recognized as a means of recovery of a language that had a high risk of disappearing.

Results are not so brilliant. Less than half of the students get to speak properly Euskera, of course not because of any legal restrictions, but because of not enough teachers training, a lack of school materials and planning mistakes. And despite the official support, in the street or in the mass media, most of the people prefer using Spanish. For example, there isn't any movie theater in Basque, and at University, only 25% of the pupils study in Euskera.

Also, D model students have lost some Spanish skills, and they have a slight problem in other disciplines (social and natural sciences), but no definitive study has been published. On the other hand, it is certain that the A and B models students do not have the minimum required Euskera skills.

This issue of the language is not the only way to peace. A big number of programs and experiences of **education for peace, coexistence and conflict resolution** are implemented in the majority of Basque schools. Many of them are based on **games**, some especially funny (working on the perception of others, acceptance of difference, empathy, trust, etc.), **tutorship** and on the system of **mediation**, between students and teachers. But also when the conflicts occur among teachers. The experiences of mediation, often coordinated by the Research Center for Peace (Gernika Gogoratuz "reminding Guernica" referring to the German bombing of the city), aim to transform the conflict removing violence and destructiveness, developing social skills, with impartial mediator teams, recruited among equals in a conflict. Also, the mediation system aims to integrate the culture of mediation and peace in the hidden curriculum of schools, and makes it explicit in its rules⁴.

³ <http://www.paralalibertad.org>

⁴ <http://www.gernikagogoratuz.org>

This system would generalize the practices for the coexistence and peace: now, one has the feeling that there are only scattered actions, not a systematic program.

Although there are some conflicts in schools related to politics **and the use of school spaces** (halls, corridors, classrooms,...) to express political views, the level of confrontation is very low and schools are not battlefields, as some expected, and normally conflicts are resolved through negotiations, which usually consist of distinguishing the opinions of a group from the rest of the school community.

Some **textbooks** have been criticized, especially about History, but teachers consider that these issues are debated more on the mass media than at schools. The textbook is a very passive resource, which is used when no other more creative formulas have been found. However, it is still used widely, but their influence on the young people's attitudes is small.

At Basque schools, in general, students find **a normal atmosphere to study** and radical solutions are being abandoned. Violent solutions end up being a problem themselves. Those who founded ETA attempted to solve a problem. Also the State-supported counterterrorism GAL, a group that killed 30 people, was also an attempt of solution, which only served to radicalize the positions, further encouraging the fight and ultimately weaken the rule of law.

In order to achieve peace, **quick solutions are not always good**, neither in politics nor in the classroom. For example, it is important to agree on the terms of dialogue, set the stage for that dialogue, for making it fruitful, not only in the Basque problem, but in all conflicts. The preparation of what we mean by certain words, to be used to listening to different views, to consider that the change of opinion is not bad, but a step towards better understanding, to distrust absolute or imposed solutions,... are habits you can work in the school to teach that the violence is not a efficient way to resolve conflicts.

It would be important to promote cohesion among students of different models, as there are problems of harmony and understanding, Felix Etxebarria thinks⁵. For a sector of Basque society and for many Spaniards, Basque educational models can lead to progressive separation from the rest of Spain, and criticize the linguistic measures. They are pessimistic about the process on long term. But this pessimism and radical positions do not consider the consequences of the new situation of virtual disappearance of borders that is occurring with the progressive integration of the European Union.

Our colleagues from **Northern Ireland could explain their progress**: they did offered Basque and Spanish political leaders to advise them, and they are a successful example of this kind of processes.

As a person who has suffered a misfortune, **focusing all the time in the pain** does not reach more than increasing it. The Basque problem has been compared to someone who suffers at constantly aching teeth. Paying attention to the school to reasonable goals (if possible shared ones) contributes to a greater sense of well being and makes those goals

⁵ "Logros y retos de la educación plurilingüe en el País Vasco" (*Achievements and challenges of the plurilingual education in the Basque country*), in *Forum Barcelona*, 2004, p. 14, http://www.barcelona2004.org/www.barcelona2004.org/esp/banco_del_conocimiento/docs/PO_35_ES_E_TXEBERRIA.pdf

become true. This does not mean forgetting or losing memory, but being careful with this kind of collective obsessions, which only lead to frustration, bad blood and violence.

In Basque schools, for studying conflicts and their solutions, it is better considered not to looking at the Basque problem but putting **other examples**. Teachers prefer considering the Palestinian, Bosnian, Irish or Kurdish problem and avoiding Basque issue, what is not fear but caution, according to 80% of teachers, who know by experience that talking about some matters lead to inevitable fights in class. Emotional factors and family background make it difficult to be impartial in the conflict analysis. Other statistics indicate that only 20% of the teachers work in any activity related to the Basque conflict⁶.

The **silence** of many members of the educational community can be explained by the confusion and the complexity of the issue: "We are not at the point of maturity where we can talk calmly of the views of one another", says a teacher. "If you knew for sure that it would bring something good, it is fine, but I know that talking to my students won't solve the Basque conflict and I can bring a terrible division in the classroom, what will cause a great difficulty working with a divided group", another teacher comments. Another one expresses that "you will have problems if you talk in a way or in another because of the high emotional content of the topic". Therefore, most of the teachers deny the advantages of making reflections at school about the problem, with colleagues or with the students. Sometimes, teachers require a guidance, resources and advices on the subject, and indicate that nobody should require them to explain the issue to the students while there are not any minimum agreements among politicians. Although there are also different points of view, and some teachers complain about the lack in political education at schools, generally teachers avoid the Basque conflict, when they do not feel comfortable or competent, and this conflict has little impact on school life⁷.

It is important to develop cooperation, democracy and dialogue at schools and to abandon the authoritarian models. In one sentence: "take democratic initiatives, through democratic processes, getting democratic solutions."⁸

But this development is essential not only to solve the Basque problem, but to respond the changing needs in a more participative way with young people, that reclaim more than just one-way information from the teacher. The cooperative movement spreads in all the Basque country: gangs and youth clubs, choirs, sports clubs with their own building, rules and business. There is a communal tradition in so many villages, and also large companies on cooperative basis which have proved to be viable and very profitable.

⁶ "Actuación de los centros escolares ante el conflicto vasco" (*acts at schools about the Basque conflict*), 2003, in http://www.hezkuntza.ejgv.euskadi.net/r43-2459/eu/contenidos/informacion/dig2/eu_5614/adjuntos/bakea/ca_indice.htm

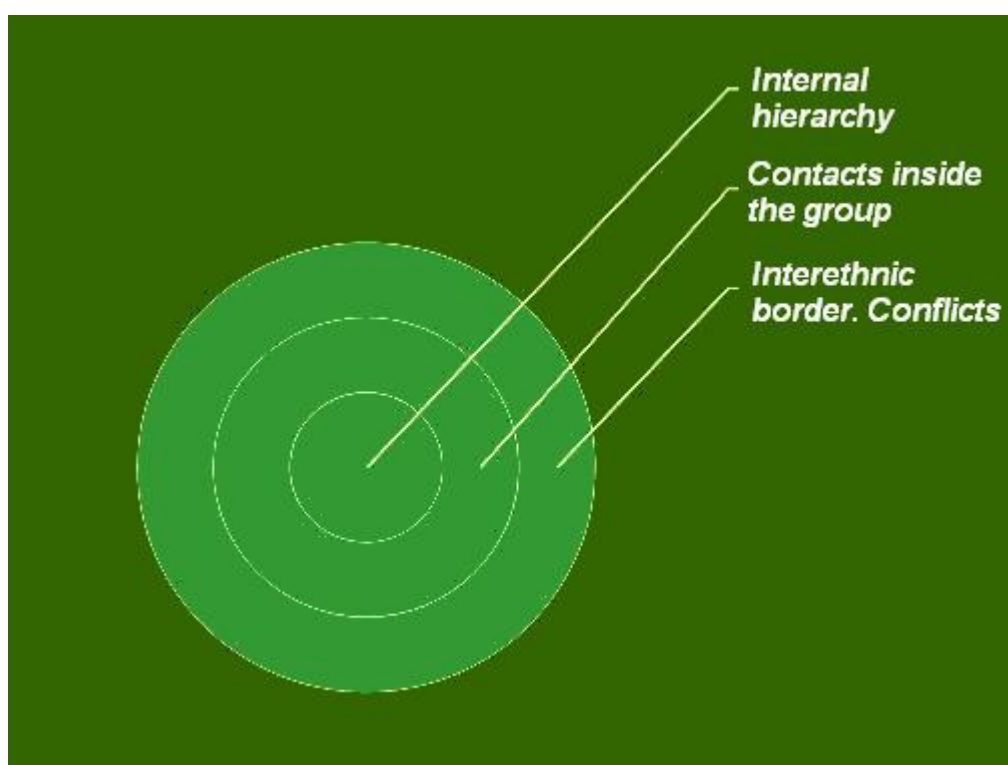
⁷ "Ideas asociadas al conflicto vasco en la comunidad escolar" (*The Basque conflict related ideas in the school community*), same address in internet, 5.1.

⁸ Jonan Fernández: "Diálogo y democracia: camino de salida" (*Dialogue and democracy: way out*), p. 4, in <http://www.edualter.org/material/euskadi/jonan.htm>

Indeed, the Basque Country cooperative network of schools, a parent-teacher alliance, was born in the 60s (the “Ikastolas”, Euskera schools without official support, without books and without means, but sometimes protected by the Church) and it is still very important. Today, many ikastolas have been accepted by the administration, and have received financial support and viability, but some teachers and parents feel a certain lack of independence that Basque society is proud of.

In recent years, new problems have appeared with mass immigration and new cultural contacts. A multicultural society requires intercultural schools: it is not a mere tolerance. Perhaps among adults “tolerance” is the correct word, which means respect, but keeping distance from the other. Interculturalism in young people means to be opened to changes. The cultural background is a starting point, not an impermeable wall. In children and teenagers multiculturalism is natural. The values are exchanged and mixed. They suffer, in general, the closed door policy of the elderly, and they are easily influenced by fanaticism, when one of these identities is attacked and the reaction becomes expansive, creating the problem that was intended to be solved. In the culture of fear, self definition needs to identify the enemy. The project of the Basque Autonomous Community “Pedagogy for an image of a friend” aims to address the problem from its psychological origin, through the knowledge and contact with the others to reach trust and friendship.

In certain minorities, the conflicts in the periphery of the group (marginal areas, poverty or social exclusion) strengthen their internal hierarchy and their affirmation of its distinguishing features, what makes it difficult to have interaction with other groups. So, some power structures maintain artificially the conflicts that give internal union and political benefits. This fact can explain partly the permanence of the Basque conflict.



Everyday and normal work of all the children at schools has contributed to make the Basque conflicts, at present, one of the four less intense ethno-political conflicts in the world⁹.

In our global village, the Basque society, through the media and its politicians, should also contribute to social peace. The mass media, by their sensational and emotional trend, present a bipolar and radicalized image of Basque society. The audiences and the votes increase with the spectacle of the conflict and this contributes to encourage or even to create the conflict. But normally, the majority is situated in intermediate positions.

It is common to see on TV a demonstration in which two opposed little groups appear face to face with banners, but it is interesting to see a great number of people who pass and look peacefully at the two groups¹⁰. If we reduce the entire problem to some simple dichotomies (violent-democratic, nationalist-cosmopolitan), we won't understand the question, and at school the students work on exercising their critical sense and objectivity, as defined in the official curriculum.

A new challenge has appeared with the education of immigrant students to achieve an adequate level of Euskera and Spanish, because they have many difficulties in any of the models to get integrated. Another aim is to develop multilingualism through education in English. This makes us reconsider the current A-B-D models system, and the teaching of Basque in Navarra or in France. We need flexibility to apply new formulas in new times.

4 - Suggestions for improvement within the new European and global context

The context for nationalism is dramatically changing in Europe: the existence of a common currency and army, police increasingly interlinked across countries, satellite TV in multiple languages of our global village, etc... All these facts make the old dichotomy outdated between Basque and Spanish or between Basque and French, or between Flemish and Walloon. We need a reformulation of the Sovereignty and identity in a more open and creative terms, compared to past models becoming increasingly obsolete. The model of Euro-regions (defined by the Council of Europe as a form of transnational cooperative structure between two or more countries) can help to clarify these situations. Democracy and Europe will surely survive although we develop a federal model.

The education in the Basque country is going towards a more cosmopolitan system, with trilingualism projects (English), and even multilingualism. This will require further training of teachers, and to arrive to some agreements about how many subjects are given in each language and on which basis?

⁹ Ted Robert Gurr: "People against States: Ethnopolitical Conflict and the Changing World System" *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 37, nº 3, 1994, pop. 347-377. In 1994, the Basque conflict was more intense than today.

¹⁰ José María Tortosa: "El País Vasco desde fuera" (*The Basque country from outside*), in <http://www.edualter.org/material/euskadi/tortosa.htm>

One modest response to this general challenge, in many parts of Europe, would be to promote into students the reading habits in different languages to increase their understanding, with special emphasis on young boys, who read less than girls in adolescence and early adulthood. Many failures in exams, for example, come from the fact that they do not understand the questions.

Social Guarantee programs, dealing with students in a situation of social risk, should also be developed to prevent tensions and social marginality that promote violence.

In this sense it is essential to have a balanced education as a factor for pacification. Marginal minorities (gypsies, immigrants) must go to school regularly to avoid ghettos, areas of frustration and social tensions that lead to violent responses. This is the first step to get a complete system of education for peace.

Teachers must also be involved not only in the traditional classroom, but also in mass media, taking positions on the Internet (if not, others will do it) and participate in debates on television. We remind here to the film-dialogue Pelota Vasca (Basque ball) that has been a good way of dialogue, impossible in any other form, among all those who wanted to say something about the Basque conflict.

An obvious formal topic: we should use in our conversations the word “we” frequently. It has been proved to be a relaxing factor of family disputes, for example, why not politic or educative matters?

By itself, the education system in Spain and in the Basque country is able to self-reform to get a better level of reconciliation, and it will be possible under the most elementary quality principles: correcting mistakes, investing a significant amount of resources, good teacher training, evaluation of materials, improvement proposals, etc.

Some social groups (including some teachers) consider education and minds of young people as the main battlefield to achieve their party purposes. For them, classrooms and young minds are time bombs. But the reality is that wars have not been started at schools, rather the opposite, the peace is reached by culture.

Few people are optimistic under the current circumstances, but not because of the lack of confidence in education, but because we don't give enough importance to education. When we give economic and social importance to education, education obtains important things. This is the case of language training in the Basque Country, which has served well to recover a language, and it helped to bring more reconciliation and peace.

Hopefully external circumstances, as the economic crisis that we are living now, are not going to stop this very fruitful process.